A

SERMON

On Acts xxviij. 22.

Shewing, That the

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Is not a

SECT,

And yet that it is

Every where Spoken againſt.

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Sect
Hiresis or
Heresy

Nature of Sects 5

Chriſtianity no Sect to be ſpoken againſt.

ACTS 28. 22.

——For as concerning this Sect, we know that every where it is ſpoken againſt.

WOULD you think that ſuch a ſpiteful ſcornful Word as this ſhould ever be ſaid of the *Chriſtian Religion?* That *pure Religion and undefiled*, Jam. 1. 27. which came into the World ſupported by the ſtrongeſt Evidences of *Truth*, and recommended by the moſt endearing Allurements of *Grace* and *Goodneſs*: The *ſayings* whereof are ſo *faithful*, 1 Tim. 1. 15. and ſo well *worthy of all acceptation*: That Sacred Inſtitution which ſcatters the brighteſt Rays of Divine *Light* and *Love* that ever were darted from Heaven to Earth: That's it which is here ſo invidiouſly call'd a *Sect*, and is ſaid to be *every where ſpoken againſt*.

It will be worth while to obſerve,

1. Who they were that ſaid this, they were

the *chief of the Jews* that were at *Rome*, *ver.* 17. The *Jews* were look'd upon (at least they look'd upon themselves) as a very *knowing* People; The *Jews* at *Rome*; a place of Learning and Enquiry, thought themselves more *knowing* than the other Jews; St. *Paul* in his Epistle to the *Romans*, chap. 17. 2----20. takes notice of it: *Thou art called a Jew, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his Will, -----and art confident that thou thy self art a Guide of the Blind, a Light of them which are in Darkness*, &c. And we have reason to suppose that *the Chief* of the Jews there who had the greatest Advantages of Education and Correspondence, were the most intelligent: It might also be justly expected that upon the first notices of the Gospel, the *Jews* should have been of all People most ready to acquaint themselves with a Religion which was so much the Honour and Perfection of *their own*: And yet it seems, the *Jews*, the *chief* of the Jews at *Rome* knew no more of Christianity but this, that it was *a Sect every where spoken against*. *This we know*, (said they) and it was all they knew concerning it.

1 *Thes.* 2. 15, 16.

† Tertullian *confidently asserts* Primum Neronem in hanc Sectam tum maxime Romæ orientem, Cæsariano gladio ferociisse. *Apol.* cap. 5

The *Jews* were of all other the most bitter and inveterate *Enemies* to the Christians; while the *Roman* Emperors tolerated them, (as they did till *Nero*'s time †) the *Jews* with an unwearied Malice persecuted them from City to City, and were the first Wheel in most of the Opposition that the Gospel met with, when it was first Preached: Now one would think they would not have been so vigorous and industrious to suppress Christianity if they had not very well acquainted themselves with it, and known it to deserve such opposition; But it seems by this, they *knew* little or nothing of the Religion they

they so much *maligned*, had never search'd into the Merits of its Cause, not weigh'd the Proofs of its Divine Authority, but against all Law and Reason condemn'd it (*de ipsa causa*, as *Justin Martyr* complains) purely upon *common Fame*, and follow the cry to run it down, because it was *every where spoken against*. *Inquisitione & agnitione neglecta. Nomen detinetur. Nomen expugnatur ----- Vox sola prædamnat.* Tert. Ap. c. 3.

2. Upon what occasion they said this. They were now appointing a time to discourse with St. *Paul* upon the *grand Question* in debate, whether *Jesus* of *Nazareth* was the true *Messiah* or no. And they seem'd willing to hear what that great Man had to say in defence of the Religion he preach'd, *We desire* (say they) *to hear of thee what thou thinkest*, ----- Now one would expect that so good a *Cause*, managed by such a skilful *Advocate*, would not but carry the day, and be Victorious, and that they would all have been brought over to the belief of Christianity; But we find *v.* 24. that it prov'd otherwise; after all, there were those that *believed not*, and the Text intimates the reason of their Infidelity, they came to hear the word under a *Prejudice*; They had already imbib'd an ill opinion of the way, which right or wrong they resolved to *hold fast*; And tho' some of them by the help of Divine Grace got over this stumbling Block, that like the *Bereans* were *more Noble* than the rest, and of freer thought: yet many of them continued under the power of those Prejudices, and were seal'd up under Unbelief, *v.* 26. 27. Thus is the Power of the *Word* in many, baffled by the Power of *Prejudice*. They *do not* believe, because they are resolved they *will not*: They conclude that no *good thing* can *come out of* Nazareth, and will not be perswaded to *come and* Acts 17. 11. John 1. 46.

Prov. 18. 13. John 7. 51. *see*: Thus do they prejudge the Cause, *answering the matter before they hear it*, and it will prove *folly and shame* to them.

Now in the Account they here give of their Knowledge of the Christian Religion, we may observe,

1. That they look'd upon it to be a *Sect*, and we'll prove that to be *false*.

2. ----A Sect *every where spoken against*, and we will grant that to be *true*, that it is generally spoken against, tho' 'tis most unreasonable and unjust it should be so.

Αἵρεσις or Heresy

αἵρεσις, *Electio opinio*, An Opinion not *forced* upon us by the Evidences of Truth, but *chosen* by us with some foreign Design.

First, The Christian Religion is here called (but miscalled) a *Sect*, αἵρεσις, a Heresy. *After the way which they call Heresy*, (saith St. Paul, Acts 24. 14.) *so worship I the God of my Fathers*, -----*The Sect of the* Nazarenes, so *Tertullus* calls it in his opening of the Indictment against *Paul*, *Acts* 24. 5. it's call'd *this way*, *Acts* 9. 2. and *that way*, *Acts* 19. 9. as if it were a *By-path* out of the common Road. The Practice of serious Godliness is still look'd upon by many as a *Sect* that is a Party-business, and a piece of affected *singularity* in Opinion and Practice tending to promote some carnal *Design*, by creating and supporting invidious *Distinctions* among Men. This is the proper notion of a *Sect*, and therefore the Masters and Maintainers of Sects are justly in an *ill Name*, as Enemies to the great Corporation of *Mankind*; but there is not the least colour of Reason to put this invidious and scandalous Character upon the Christian Religion. However, it may be mistaken and misrepresented, it is very far from being really a *Sect*. There were Sects of Religion among the Jews;

Jews; we read of the *Sect of the Sadducees*, Acts 5. 17. which was built upon *peculiar notions*, ſuch as overturn'd the foundation of *Natural* Religion, by denying a future ſtate of *Rewards* and *Puniſhments*. There was alſo the *Sect of the Phariſees*, Acts 15. 5. the *ſtraiteſt Sect* of their *Religion*, Acts 26. 5. which was founded in the obſervance and impoſition of *ſingular* Rites and Cuſtoms, with an affected *ſeparation* from, and *contempt* of all Mankind: Theſe were *Sects*: But there is nothing of the Spirit and Genius of theſe in the Chriſtian Religion, as it was inſtituted by its great Author.

1. True Chriſtianity eſtabliſheth that which is of *common* concernment to all Mankind, and therefore is not a *Sect*. The *Truths* and *Precepts* of the everlaſting Goſpel are perfective of and no way repugnant to the *Light* and *Law* of Natural Religion. Is that a *Sect* which gives ſuch mighty Encouragements and Aſſiſtances to thoſe that *in every Nation fear God and work Righteouſneſs?* Acts 10. 34. Is that a *Sect* which tends to nothing elſe but to reduce the revolted Race of Mankind to their *Ancient* Allegiance to the great Creator, and to renew that *Image* of God upon Man which was his *Primitive* Rectitude and Felicity? Is that a *Sect* which proclaims God in Chriſt *reconciling the World unto himſelf*, and recovering it from that degenerate and deplorable State into which it was ſunk? Is that a Sect which publiſheth Good-will towards Men, and Chriſt the *Lamb of God taking away the Sins of the World?* Surely that which *concurs* ſo much with the uncorrupted and unprejudiced *Sentiments*, and *conduceth* much more to the true and real *Happineſs* of all Mankind cannot be thought to

2 Cor. 5. 19. Luke 2. 14. Joh. 1. 29. 3. 16. 1 John 2. 2.

take its rise from such narrow *Opinions*, and private *Interests*, as *Sects* owe their Original to.

2. True Christianity hath a direct tendency to the *Uniting* of the Children of Men, and the *gathering* of them *together* in *one*, and therefore is far from being a *Sect*, which is suppos'd to lead to Division, and to sow Discord among Brethren. The Preaching of the Gospel did indeed prove the *occasion* of Contention. Our Saviour foresaw and foretold it would be so, *Luke* 12. 51, 52, 53. that his Disciples and Followers would be *Men of strife*, in the same sense that the Prophet was, *Jer.* 15. 10. not Men *striving*, but Men *striven with*; but the Gospel was by no means the *Cause* of this Contention, for it was intended to be the *Cure* of all Contention. If there be any who under the Cloak and Colour of the Christian Name *cause Divisions*, and propagate Feuds and Quarrels among Men, let them *bear their own Burthen*; but it is certain that the Christian Religion as far as it obtains its just Power and Influence upon the minds of Men will make them Meek and Quiet, Humble and Peaceable, Loving and Useful, Condescending and Forgiving, and every way Easy, and Acceptable and Profitable one to another. Is that a Sect which was introduced with a Proclamation of *Peace on Earth*? That which beats Swords into Plow-shares, and Spears into Pruning-hooks? Or, was he the *Author* of a *Sect* who is the Great *Creator* of *Unity*, and who Died to break down *partition Walls*, and to *slay* all *Enmities*, that he might *gather together in one the Children of God that were scattered abroad*? Was he the Author of a Sect who came into the World *not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save* them, and who taught his

Secta dicitur à *Secando.*

Eph. 2. 14, 15, 16.
John 11. 52.
Luk. 9. 56.

his Followers not only to love one another, but to love their *Enemies*, and to count every one their *Neighbour*, that they could be any way serviceable to? Luke 10. 36, 37.

3. True Christianity aims at no Worldly Benefit or Advantage, and therefore must by no means be call'd a *Sect*. Those that espouse a *Sect* are suppos'd to be govern'd in it by their secular Interest, and to aim at Wealth, or Honour, or the gratification of some *base* Lust: The *Pharisees* proved themselves to be a Sect by their Thirst after the *praise of Men*, and their greedy *devouring of Widows Houses*. But the Professors of Christianity have not only been taught by the Law of their Religion, to live above this World, and to look upon it with a Holy Contempt, but have been expos'd by their Profession to the Loss and Ruine of all their secular Comforts and Enjoyments. Are those to be accounted *politick* and *designing* Sectaries that have for Christ chearfully *suffered the loss of all things*? Is Phil. 2. 8. that a *Sect* which instead of preferring a Man to Honour, or raising him an Estate, lays him open to Disgrace and Poverty, renders him obnoxious to Fines and Forfeitures, Banishments and Imprisonments, Racks and Tortures, Flames and Gibbets, which were the common Lot of the Primitive Christians? *Cæsar Vanninus* a sworn Enemy to the Christian Religion, and one who was industrious in searching out *Objections* against it, own'd he could find nothing in it that favour'd of a *Carnal* and *Worldly* Design; No, it hath always approv'd it self a *Heavenly Calling*, and the strictest Professors of it (even their Enemies themselves being Judges) have had *their Conversation in the World in Simplicity, and Godly Sin-* Heb. 3. 1. 2 Cor. 1. 12.

Sincerity, not with Fleshly Wisdom. Very unjustly therefore it is called a *Sect*.

As to this therefore, suffer a Word of *Caution* and *Exhortation*.

1. Let us take heed lest our Profession of Religion degenerate into any thing which may make it look like a *Sect*. *Christianity* as it was instituted by Christ is not a *Sect*, let not *Christians* then be *Sectaries*. We make our Profession of Religion a *Sect* when we monopolize the Church and its Ministry and Sacraments, and spend that zeal in matters of *doubtful Disputation* which should be reserved for the *weightier matters of the Law*. When we place our Religion in
Rom. 14. 17, 18. *Meats* and *Drinks*, which should be placed in *Righteousness*, and *Peace*, and *Joy in the Holy Ghost*. When we profess Religion with a *Conceit* of our selves, and a *Contempt* of others, and with any Worldly secular Design; when we sacrifice the common Interests of Christ's Kingdom to the particular Interests of a Party, and in a word, when our Profession is tainted with
Luke 12. 1. the *Leaven of the Pharisees*, which is both *sowring* and *swelling*, then it degenerates into a Sect. Let us therefore adhere to the *sure* and *large Foundations*, and be acted by a Principle of Love to,
1 Cor. 1. 2 and so maintain Communion with *all that in every place*, and under every Denomination, *call on the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours*. Let us be Modest in our Opinions, Charitable and Candid in our Censures, Self-denying in all our Converse, Acting always under the Influence of that *Wisdom that is from above*,
Jam. 3. 17. which is *first Pure, then Peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality and Hypocrisy*, that by this well-doing

ing we may *put to ſilence the Ignorance* of thoſe who call Religion a *Sect*. 1 Pet. 2. 15.

2. Let us not be deterr'd from *ſerious Godlineſs*, or any of the *Inſtances* of it, by the invidious Name of a *Sect*, which is put upon it. If a *ſtrict* and ſober and circumſpect *Converſation*, a conſcientious Government of our *Tongue*, Praying and ſinging Pſalms in our *Families*, a religious Obſervation of the *Lord's Day*, a diligent Attendance upon the *Means of Grace*, joyning in *religious Societies* for Prayer and Chriſtian Conference, and endeavouring in our places the *Suppreſſion* of Profaneſs and Immorality, if theſe and the like be call'd and counted the Marks and Badges of a *Sect*, let us not be moved at it, but ſay as *David* did, 2 *Sam.* 6. 22. *If this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile.* If the Practice of Piety be branded as a *Sect*, it is better for us to come under the *reproaches* of Men for following it, than under the *Curſe* of God for neglecting it. It is a *very ſmall thing to be judged of Man's* Day, *but he that judgeth us is the Lord:* Let us therefore be more afraid of *being Sectaries*, than of being call'd ſo. 1 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

Secondly, The Chriſtian Religion is here ſaid to be *every where ſpoken againſt*. That it was *ſpoken againſt* was evident enough, but that it was *every where* ſpoken againſt, was more than they could be *ſure* of: They did not know *all* Places, nor had they correſpondence with, or intelligence from *every* Country; but we muſt not wonder if thoſe that oppoſe the *Truth* as it is in Jeſus, make no conſcience of tranſgreſſing the Laws of *Truth* in common Converſation. But we will ſuppoſe that the Acquaintance and Converſe

verse of those Jews at *Rome* lay mostly with those that were Enemies to Christianity, and spoke against it, and they therefore concluded it *every where* spoken against because they found it spoken against in all places that they *came to*, or had *advice from*. Thus apt are we to embrace that as a *general* Sentiment and Observation which we find received by those that we *usually* associate with, and so we run our selves into *mistakes*, which larger and more impartial Enquiries would soon *rectify*.

But we will take it for granted, however, that what they said was *true*, not because they said it, but because the experience of all Ages doth confirm it, and concur with it: So that a little Acquaintance with *Books* and the *World* will *prove* the *Observation* which we ground upon this Text;

Doct. *That it is, and always hath been, the Lot of Christ's Holy Religion, to be every where spoken against.* Or thus:

That true Christianity hath all along met with a great deal of Opposition and Contradiction in this World.

I purpose not to enter into a particular Disquisition of that which has been, and is spoken against Religion, nor do I undertake at present to shew how false and unreasonable it is, That hath been done many a time by the best Hands, and so effectually that every impartial eye must needs look upon the cause of the Adversaries of Religion to be a *baffled* Cause: But I shall only make some *improvement* of this general Observation, which cannot be unseasonable in an Age wherein the Gates of Hell seem to be making their utmost efforts against the Church; and the Devil, as the Calumniator and False Accuser

cuſer to be *more wroth* than ever *with the Woman* the Church, and to puſh on the *War* with an unuſual vigor againſt the *remnant of her Seed, which keep the Commandments of God, and have the Teſtimony of Jeſus Chriſt.* Rev. 12. 17.

I ſhall therefore (1.) enquire *what it is* in Chriſtianity that is *ſpoken againſt.* And (2.) ſhew you *why* ſo Holy and Excellent a Religion is *ſpoken againſt*, and then draw ſome Inferences from this Obſervation.

For the firſt, Who and What it is that is ſpoken againſt.

1. *Jeſus Chriſt*, the Author of our Religion, is *every where ſpoken againſt.* When the Firſt-begotten was brought into the World, old *Simeon*, among other great things, pronounced this concerning him, that he was a *ſign which* ſhould be *ſpoken againſt*, and by that means was ſet *for the fall of many*, Luke 2. 34. When he was here upon Earth he was *ſpoken againſt.* The *Stone*, which was deſign'd to be the *Head of the Corner*, was *rejected*, and ſet at naught by the Builders. Pſal. 118. 22. It was not the leaſt of his Sufferings in the days of his fleſh, that he *endured the contradiction of Sinners againſt himſelf*, Heb. 12. 3. They ſpoke againſt his *Perſon* as mean and contemptible, and one that had *no form, nor comlineſs*: They ſpoke againſt his *Preaching* as falſe and deceiving, *John* 7. 12. as factious and ſeditious, *Luke* 23. 2. as ſenſeleſs and ridiculous, for the *Phariſees* derided him for it, *Luke* 16. 14. They ſpake againſt his *Miracles* as done in Confederacy with *Belzebub the Prince of the Devils*, *Mat.* 12. 24. They ſpoke againſt his *Morals*, charging him with Blaſphemy againſt God, Profanation of the Sabbath-day; and all the inſtances of Debanchery which were Iſa. 53. 2, 3.

uſually

usually met with in a *Gluttonous Man*, a *Wine-bibber*, and a *Friend of Publicans and Sinners*, Mat. 11. 19. They spoke against his *Followers* as a company of ignorant despicable People, *John* 7. 48. 49. When he was in his Sufferings, pass through all the steps and stages of them, and you will find him *every where* spoken against, They reproched him in all his *Offices*, In his Office of *Teaching*, when they challenged him to tell who *smote him*: In his Office of *Saving*, when they challenged him to *save himself* as he had *saved others*. In his Office of *Ruling*, when they challenged him to prove himself the *King of the Jews* by coming *down from the Cross*. The common People spoke against him, even they that *passed by reviled him*. The *Pharisees* & chief *Priests*, the *Grandees* of the Church were as *severe* as any in their Reflections upon him, *Princes also* did *sit and speak against him*, *Herod* and his Men of War set him at nought, *made nothing* of him that made all things.

Mat. 27. 39.

Luke 23. 11. ἐξουθένησας.

Nay, even *now* he is set down at the right-hand of the Majesty on high, *far above all Principalities and Powers*, i. e. both *good* and *evil* Angels, so as to be no more *hurt* by the *contradictions* of the one, than he is *benefitted* by the *Adorations* of the other, yet still he is *spoken against*. Besides the Contempt cast upon him by the *Jews* and *Mahometans*, are there not *with us*, even *with us*, those that daringly speak against him? *Arians* and *Socinians* are daily speaking against him as a *meer Man*, thinking that a Robbery in him, which He thought none, to be *equal with God*; *Quakers* and *Enthusiasts* speak against Him as a *meer Name*, setting up I know not what Christ within them, while they explode that *Jesus* that was Crucified at *Jerusalem*.

Eph. 1. 20. 21.

Phil. 2. 6.

Atheists,

Atheists and *Deists* speak against Him as a *meer Cheat*, accounting the Religion he established a great Imposture, and His Gospel a *Jest*. Profane and Ignorant People speak slightly of Him, as if our *Beloved* were no more than *another Beloved*; and some speak scornfully of Him, as *Julian* the Apostate did, that call'd Him in disdain the *Galilean*, and the *Carpenter's Son*. Such as these are the *hard speeches, which ungodly Sinners have spoken against Him*, the Lord rebuke them, even the Lord that hath chosen *Jerusalem* rebuke them. Cant. 5. 9. Jude 15.

2. *God himself* the great Object of our Religious Regards, is *every where spoken against*. It is not only the *Christian Revelation* that is thus attack'd by virulent and blasphemous Tongues, but even *Natural Religion* also. The Glorious and Blessed God the great Creator and Benefactor of the Universe, that doth Good to all, and whose tender Mercies are over all His Works, even He is *every where spoken against*. Some deny His Being: Tho' His Existence be so *necessary*, so *evident*, that if He *be not*, tis impossible any thing else should *be*, yet there are Fools who *say in their hearts*, what they dare not speak out, *that there is no God*, Psal. 14. 1. And he that saith there *is* no God wisheth there *were* none, and if he could help it there *should* be none. Others Blaspheme the Attributes of God, that charge the All-seeing *Eye* with *Blindness*, saying, *The Lord shall not see*, Psal. 94. 7. that charge the Eternal *Mind* with *Forgetfulness*, saying, *God hath forgotten*, Psal. 10. 11. that charge the Almighty *Arm* with *Impotency*, saying, *Can God furnish a Table in the Wilderness*, which is there call'd speaking *against God*, Psal. 78. 19, 20.

20. Those speak [illegible] God that promise themselves Impunity in Sin, saying, They shall *not* Gen. 3. 4. *surely die*, and [illegible] *will not require it*. And Pſ. 10. 13. those that boldly [illegible] Impiety and Irreligion, saying unto the Almighty, *Depart from us* — Job 21. 14, 15. Some [illegible] *meanly* of God, tho' He is infinitely Great and Glorious, others ſpeak *hardly* of Him, tho' he is infinitely Juſt and Good. The *Name* of God is *ſpoken againſt* by the profane uſing of it; ſo it is conſtrued *Pſal.* 139. 20. *They ſpeak againſt thee wickedly, thine Enemies take thy Name in vain.* Can there be a greater ſlight put upon the Eternal God than for Men to uſe his Sacred and Bleſſed Name as a *By-word*, with which they give vent to their exorbitant *Paſſions*, or fill up the *vacancies* of their other *Idle-words*? The Name of God is thus abus'd not only by thoſe that belch out bloody Oaths and Curſes which make the Ears of every good Man to tingle, but by thoſe that *mention* the Name of God *ſlightly* and *irreverently*, in Jer. 12. 2. their common Converſation; in whoſe *mouths* he is *near* when he is *far from their reins*. To uſe thoſe forms of ſpeech which properly ſignify an Acknowledgment and Adoration of God's Being, as *O God*, or *O Lord*, or an Appeal to his Omniſcience, as *God knows*, or an Invocation of his Favour, as *God bleſs me*, or *God be merciful to me*, I ſay, to uſe theſe or the like expreſſions *impertinently*, and intending thereby to expreſs only our *wonder*, our *ſurprize*, or our paſſionate *reſentments*, or any thing than that which is their proper and awful ſignification, is an evidence of a *vain mind*, that wants a due regard to Deut. 28. *that glorious and fearful Name*, The *Lord our God*. 58. I ſee not that the Profanation of the Ordinance

of

of *Praying*, is any better than the Profanation of the Ordinance of *Swearing*. The serious consideration of this, I hope, might prevent much of that Dishonour which is done to God, and to his Holy Name, by some that run not with others to an excess of Riot.

The *Providence* of God is likewise every where spoken against by *Murmurers* and *Complainers* that quarrel with it, and find fault with the disposals of it, and when they are *hardly bestead* *curse their King and their God.* Thus is the *mouth* of the ungodly *set against the Heavens, and their Tongue walketh through the Earth.* Jude 16. Isa. 8. 21. Psal. 73. 9.

3. The *Word of God* the great Rule of our Religion is every where *spoken against*, so it was when it was first *preached*, wherever the Apostles went preaching the Doctrine of Christ they met with those that *spake against it, contradicting and blaspheming*, Acts 13. 45. So it is, now it is *written*, *Atheists* speak against the Scriptures as not of Authority, *Papists* speak against it as dark and uncertain further than it is *expounded*, and *supported* by the Authority of their Church, which * receives unwritten Traditions *pari pietatis affectu ac reverentiâ*, with the *same* pious affection and reverence that they receive the Scripture, nay, and if we may judge by their practice, with *much more*. Thus is the Word of God blasphemed by them who call themselves the *Temple of the Lord*. But if we take away *Revelation* (as the *Deists* do) all *Religion* will soon be lost, and if we derogate from the *Scriptures* (as the *Papists* do) all Revelation is much endangered. * *Trident. Concil. Sess.* 4th.

Those also *speak against* the Scriptures, who profanely *Jest* with them, and that they may the

the more securely Rebel against *Scripture Laws*, make themselves and their idle Companions merry with the *Scripture Language*. *The Word of the Lord is unto them a reproach*, as the Prophet complains, *Jer.* 6. 10. And another Prophet found it so, whose serious word of the necessity of *Precept upon Precept* was turned into an *idle Song*, (as *Grotius* understands it) *Isa.* 28. 13. *The word of the Lord was unto them Precept upon Precept*—— Very likely it was done by the *Drunkards of Ephraim*, spoken of *v.* 1. and it gave occasion to that Caution, *v.* 22. *Be ye not mockers lest your Bands be made strong*. Profligate and Debauched Minds relish no wit like that which ridicules the Sacred Text, and exposeth that to Contempt: As of old the insulting *Babylonians* must be *humour'd* with the *Songs of* Sion; and no Cups can please *Belshazzar* in his drunken Frollick but the Sacred *Vessels of the Temple*. Thus industrious are the Powers of Darkness to *Vilify* the Scriptures, and to make them *contemptible*; but he that sits in Heaven shall laugh at them, for in spite of all the little efforts of their impotent Malice, *He will magnifie the Law and make it honourable*, according to the word which he hath spoken, *Isa.* 42. 21.

Ps. 137. 3.

Dan. 5. 2, 3.

4. The *People of God*, the Professors of this Religion are every where spoken against. Not only those of some particular Perswasion or Denomination, but (without regard to that) such as have been zealous in fearing God, and working Righteousness have been, in many places, very much spoken against. Our Blessed Saviour hath told his Disciples what Treatment of this kind they must expect, that they should be *revil'd* and have *all manner of evil said against them falsly*,

ly, *Mat.* 5. 11, 12. that they and their *Names* ſhould be *caſt out as evil*, Luke 6. 22. And if *they called* our *Maſter*, Belzebub, no nick-names faſtned upon his Followers can ſeem ſtrange. *Mat.* 5. 25. *Mocking* was an old way of perſecuting the Covenant-Seed, for thus, *He that was after the Fleſh, betimes perſecuted them that were after the Spirit.* Compare *Gen.* 21. 9. with *Gal.* 4. 29. God's *Heritage* hath always been as a *ſpeckled Bird*, that all the Birds are againſt, *Jer.* 12. 9. And his Children *for ſigns and for wonders in* Zach. 3. 8. *Iſrael*, that every one hath a *ſaying to*. *Iſa.* 8. 18. Even Wiſdoms Children have been call'd and counted Fools, and *their life Madneſs*; The *Quiet in the Land* repreſented as Enemies to the Publick Peace; And thoſe who are the greateſt Bleſſings of the Age branded as the *Troublers of Iſrael*. The *Primitive* Chriſtians were painted out to the World under the blackeſt and moſt odious Characters that could be, as Men of the moſt *profligate* Lives and Conſciences, and that even placed their Religion in the groſſeſt Impieties and Immoralities imaginable. Their Enemies found it neceſſary for the ſupport of the Kingdom of the Devil, the Father of Lies and Slanders, (*fortiter Calumniari*) to Characterize them as the *worſt* of Men, to whom they were reſolv'd to give the *worſt* and moſt barbarous Treatment. It had not been poſſible to have *baited* them, if they had not firſt dreſs'd them up in the *ſkins* of *wild Beaſts*. And as then, ſo ever ſince, more or leſs in all Ages of the Church, Reproach hath been entail'd upon the moſt ſerious and zealous Profeſſors of Religion and Godlineſs.

See this at large, repreſented by *Cæcilius* in *Minucius Felix.*

5. The *Ministers of Christ*, the Preachers of this Religion, are with a *distinguishing* Enmity every where spoken against. Under the Old Testament God's *Messengers* and his *Prophets* were generally *mocked* and *misused*, and it was *Jerusalem*'s measure-filling Sin. 2 *Chron.* 36. 16. 'Twas one of the Devices they devis'd against *Jeremiah to smite him with the tongue*, because *they* would not, and they desired that *others* might not *give heed to any of his words*, *Jer.* 18. 18. Those to whom the Prophet *Ezekiel* was a *very lovely Song*, and *with their mouths showed much love* to him, yet were still *talking against him by the Walls, and in the Doors of their Houses*, and God lets him know it. *Ezek.* 33. 30, 31, 32. And then it is not strange if the Ministers of the New Testament (in which Truth shines with a stronger Light) be with no less Enmity spoken against by those that love *Darkness* rather than *Light*. The Apostles, those *prime Ministers of State* in Christ's Kingdom were so loaded with Reproach, that they were made a *spectacle to the World*, a spectacle of *Pity* to those that have either Grace or good Nature, but a spectacle of *scorn* to those that had *neither*. They were trampled upon as the *Filth of the World*; and whereas the Off-scouring of any thing is bad enough, they were look'd upon as the *off-scouring of all things*; even *unto this day*; after they had in so many instances approv'd themselves well, and could not but be made *manifest in the Consciences* of their worst Enemies, 1 *Cor.* 4. 9, 13. And it hath all along been the Policy of the Churches Enemies by all marks possible to bring the Ministry into contempt, and to represent the Churches *Nazarites*, even those that were *purer than Snow*, *whiter than Milk*,

θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν -- the *Theatre* they plaid upon.

Milk, and *more ruddy than Rubies*, with a *viſage blacker than a Coal*, ſo that they *have not been known in the ſtreets*. I allude to that complaint, *Lam.* 4. 7, 8. Marvel not, if the Standard-bearers be moſt ſtruck at.

6. The *Chriſtian Religion* it ſelf hath been and ſtill is *every where ſpoken againſt*. The *Truths* of it contradicted as falſe and groundleſs, the great Doctrines of the *Mediation of Chriſt*, and the *Reſurrection* of the *Dead* were ridicul'd by the *Athenian* Philoſophers, *Acts* 19. 18, 32. The *Laws* of it faulted as grievous and unreaſonable, as *hard ſayings*, which could not be born, by thoſe who bid open defiance to the Obligation of them, and ſay, *Let us break their bands aſunder, and caſt away their Cords from us*, Pſ. 2. 3. The *Ordinances* of it deſpis'd as mean, and having no form nor comelineſs. *Sabbaths mock'd at*, as of old, *Lam.* 1. 7. and the ſanctification of them repreſented as only a Cloak for Idleneſs. *Sacraments* reproach'd, and the Sacred Memorial of Chriſt's Death and Sufferings, by the Perſecutors of the Primitive Chriſtians repreſented to the World as the bloody and inhumane Killing and Eating of a Child, and their *Love Feaſts* and *Holy Kiſs* (which were then in uſe) as only introductions to the moſt abominable uncleanneſs. Primitive Chriſtianity was induſtriouſly put into an ill-name: it was call'd emphatically *The Atheiſm*, becauſe it overthrew Idolatry, and undermin'd the falſe Gods, and worſhips that had ſo long obtain'd. This was the Out-cry at *Epheſus*, that if *Paul*'s Doctrine took place, the *Temple of the great Goddeſs* would be deſpis'd, *Acts* 19. 26, 27. It was alſo branded as a *Novelty*, and an up-ſtart Doctrine, becauſe it took

---cui ſeptima quæque fuit lux Ignava---
Juvenal. Sat. 5.

Dicimur ſceleratiſſimi de Sacramento infanticidij, & pabulo inde. & poſt convivium inceſto, &c.
Tertull. Apol. cap. 7.

1 Pet. 1. 18. Acts 17. 18, 19. See Dr. *Cave's* Primitive Christianity, lib. 1. ch. 1.

people off from that *vain Conversation* which they had *received by Tradition from their Fathers.* It was call'd at *Athens* a *New Doctrine*, and industriously represented in all places as a *Mushrome Sect*, that was but of yesterday. It was look'd upon as nearly allied to *Judaism*, because it was so much supported by the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and nothing was more despicable among the *Romans* than the *Jews*, and *their* Religion. The Professors of Christianity were look'd upon as unlearned and ignorant Men, *Acts* 4.12. the very Dregs and Refuse of the People. *Julian* forbad the calling of them *Christians*, and would have them called nothing but *Galileans*, thereby to expose them to the contempt of those who are (as indeed most people are) govern'd more by a *sound* of Words than by the *reason* of Things. Thus when the Devil was *silenced* in his *Oracles* (as it is well known he was upon the setting up of Christianity in the World) his mouth was opened in Lies and Slanders; and being forced to quit his pretentions to a *Deity*, he appears bare-faced, as a *Devil*, (Διάβολος) a *False Accuser.*

Greg. Nazian. Invectiv. in Julian. Orat. 1. p. (mihi) 42.

The Reformed Religion in these latter ages, hath been in like manner *spoken against*: Though it *maintains all* that, [and only that] Doctrine, which Christ and his Apostles preach'd, and was before *Luther* there, where Popery, as such, never was before or since, that is, in the Holy Scriptures, yet the Professors and Preachers of it have been call'd and counted *Hereticks*, and *Schismaticks*, and by all possible Artifices expos'd to the odium of the People, that *none might Buy or Sell*, i. e. have the benefit and comfort of civil Society and Commerce, that *had not the Mark*,

Lollards from *Lolium*, Tares so my Ld. *Cook* from Mr. *Fox.*

Rev. 13.17

or

or the Name of the Beaſt, or the Number of his Name. Rev. 13. 17.

Nay, even among ſome that profeſs the Chriſtian and Reformed Religion, yet the Practice of *ſerious Godlineſs* is very much *ſpoken againſt*. The *Power* of Religion is not only diſliked and *deny'd*, but contradicted and condemned by thoſe that reſt in the *Form*. They that *call the Evil, Good*, will call *the Good, Evil*; and it is not ſtrange if they, who abandon themſelves to *work all uncleanneſs with greedineſs*, ſpeak ill of ſuch as *run not* with them *to the ſame exceſs of Riot*, where the *Wicked walk on every ſide, he that departeth from evil maketh himſelf a prey*. The old Enmity between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent is ſtill working, and the old Game every day plaid over again. The *Truth as it is in Jeſus*, and the *Truth which is according to Godlineſs* will be contradicted by thoſe that *lye in wait to deceive*. *Bigots* on all ſides will have ſomething to ſay againſt *Catholick Charity* and *Moderation*: They that are *fervent in ſpirit, ſerving the Lord*, and *forward to every good Work*, muſt expect to be evil ſpoken of by ſuch as affect a *Lukewarmneſs*, and *Indifferency* in Religion: Nor can thoſe who *walk circumſpectly, not as Fools but as Wiſe*, eſcape the laſh of *their* Tongues *who* live at large, and walk looſly, and *at all adventures*, as the *Fools in* Iſrael.

Iſa. 5. 20. 1 Pet. 4. 3, 4. Pſal. 12. 8. Iſa. 59. 15. Eph. 4. 21. compar'd with Tit. 1. 1.

I come now in the *Second Place* to enquire *what's the Reaſon* that ſo Holy and Excellent a Religion as Chriſtianity is, meets with ſuch hard uſage, and is thus ſpoken againſt, *every where ſpoken againſt*: When we hear ſuch an Out-cry as this made againſt Chriſtianity, it is natural

to us to enquire, as *Pilate* did when such a Clamour was raised against its Author, *Why, what evil hath it done?* Truly we may say concerning it as *Pilate* did concerning him, *We find no fault in it.* Which of all its Opposers convinceth it of Sin or Error? It invades no Man's Right, breaks in upon no Man's Property, is no Disturbance of the Peace, no Enemy to the Welfare of Families and Societies, is no Prejudice at all to the Interests of States aad Princes, but to all these highly Beneficial and Advantageous: *Why then is it* thus accused, condemned and *spoken against?* We will endeavour to find out the *true* Reason of it, though it is impossible to assign a *justifiable* Reason of that which is most *unreasonable.*

1. The Adversaries of Religion speak against it *because they do not know it.* Sound Knowledge hath not a greater Enemy in the World than *Ignorance.* Our Lord Jesus was therefore despised and hated by the World, because the World *knew him not*, *John* 1. 10. *If they had known* the Dignity of his Person, the Excellency of his Doctrine, and the gracious Design and Purpose of his coming into the World, certainly they *would not have Crucified the Lord of Glory*, 1 Cor. 2. 8. They that did it, did it *through Ignorance*, and *knew not what* they did. Thus they who *say to the Almighty, Depart from us*, could not say so if they did not at the same time studiously decline *the knowledge of his ways.* No Man will speak against Religion and the Power of it, that hath either seriously weighed the Proofs and Evidences of it, or impartially tried the Comfort and Benefit of it. If they *knew this Gift*, this inestimable Gift of *God*, instead of speaking against it, they

Acts 3.15, 17.
Luke 23. 34.
Job 21. 14.
John 4. 10.

they would covet it earneſtly as the beſt Gift. He that looks at a diſtance upon Men *Dancing*, would think them to be mad: (It was *Peter Martyr's* Compariſon, in a Sermon which had ſo good an influence upon the Converſion of the *Marqueſs* of *Vico*) But let him come nearer them, and obſerve the Regularity and Harmony of all their Motions and Poſtures, and he will not only admire their *Order*, but find in *himſelf* an inclination to join with them: So he that contents himſelf with a diſtant and tranſient view of the Practice of Piety will perhaps take up hard thoughts of it, but a better Acquaintance will rectify the Miſtake. When the Spouſe in the *Canticles* had given a Deſcription of her Beloved to the Daughters of *Jeruſalem*, the ſame who before had ſcornfully ask'd, *What is thy Beloved more than another Beloved?* Now as ſeriouſly enquire, *Whither is thy Beloved gone, that we may ſeek him with thee?* The People of God are called his *Hidden Ones*, and their Life is a *Hidden Life*, their way *above*, and therefore it is that the World ſpeaks evil of them, becauſe it *knows them not*. 1 *Joh.* 3. 1. They who *ſpeak evil of* theſe *Dignities*, *ſpeak evil of thoſe things which they know not*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks *Jude* 8. 10. How unjuſt then, and unreaſonable is the Enmity and Malice of the Adverſaries of Religion, to condemn that which they never enquired into, and to load that with the vileſt *Reproaches* which for ought they *know*, merits the higheſt *Encomiums*! And how excellent then are the ways of God, which none ſpeak ill of but thoſe that are unacquainted with them! while thoſe that know them witneſs to the goodneſs of them, and *Wiſdom is juſtified of all her Children*, Mat. 11. 19.

Cant. 5. 9. 6. 1.

Pſal. 83. 3. Col. 3. 3. Prov. 15. 24. Pſa. 10 5.

Quid iniquius quam ut oderint homines quod ignorant. Tunc enim meretur, quando cognoſcitur an meretur Tert. Apol. cap. 1.

2. They ſpeak againſt it *becauſe they do not like it*, and we know *Ill-will never ſpeaks well*. Tho' they have little acquaintance with Religion, yet they know this concerning it in general, that it is not agreeable with the *way of their hearts* which they are reſolved to walk in, nor with the *courſe of this World*, which is the Card and Compaſs they ſteer by, and from which they take their meaſures; they know this, that it lays a reſtraint upon their Appetites and Paſſions, and conſiſts much in the mortifying of their beloved Luſts and Corruptions, and therefore they have a ſecret *Antipathy* to it: The *Carnal Mind*, which is *enmity againſt God*, is ſo againſt all that bear the Image of God. Chriſt hath bidden his Diſciples to expect the Hatred of the World, and not to marvel at it, *Joh.* 15. 18, &c. They who *hate to be* themſelves *reform'd* will never love thoſe that *are* reform'd: Out *of the abundance* therefore *of the Heart*, and the Malignity that is there, it is no marvel if *the mouth ſpeak*; where the *Root of Bitterneſs* is, it will bear *Gall and Wormwood*. The Daring Sinner that *ſtretcheth out his hand againſt God* finds his hand too ſhort to *reach* him; but *ſay they, with our Tongue will we prevail, our Lips are our own.* The Beaſt that made War with Heaven in the Apocalyptick Viſion, though he had *ten Horns*, and thoſe *crown'd*, yet is not deſcribed doing miſchief with them, but *opening his Mouth in Blaſphemy againſt God, to blaſpheme his Name, and his Tabernacle, and them that dwell in Heaven*, Rev. 13. 5, 6. The *Poiſon* of the Serpents Seed is *under their Tongue*, Rom. 3. 13.

Antè nos incipiunt odiſſe quam noſſe, ne cognitos aut imitari poſſint, aut damnare non poſſint Min. Fel. p. (mihi) 30.

Rom. 8. 7. 1 Joh. 3. 13.

Job 15. 25.

Pſa. 12. 4.

3. They

3. They ſpeak againſt Religion *becauſe it ſpeaks againſt them.* They who have fellowſhip with the unfruitful Works of *Darkneſs*, hate the Light which diſcovers them, *Joh.* 3. 19. Nor do any curſe the Riſing Sun but thoſe that are ſcorch'd by it. Why were the *Phariſees* ſo exaſperated againſt our Saviour but becauſe he *ſpake* his Parables *againſt them*, and laid *them* open in their own colours? Why did the *World hate* him who ſo loved the World, but becauſe *he teſtified of it that its Works are evil?* Why had *Joſeph*'s Brethren ſuch a ſpleen againſt him, but becauſe he was a Witneſs againſt them, and *brought to his Father their evil Report?* Why did *Ahab* hate *Micajah*, and call *Elijah* his *Enemy* but becauſe they were the faithful Reprovers of his Wickedneſs, and *never propheſied Good concerning him, but Evil?* Why did the Inhabitants of the Earth rejoyce when the Witneſſes were ſlain, but becauſe *thoſe two Prophets* by their plain and powerful Preaching *tormented them that dwelt upon the Earth?* The everlaſting Goſpel is a *Teſtimony*, either *to us* to convince us, or *againſt us* to condemn us, and then no wonder if thoſe ſpeak againſt it who hate to be convinced by it, and dread to be *condemned* by it. The Prophet complains of thoſe that laid *Snares for him that reproveth in the gate*; and why is it faithful Miniſters are ſo much hated, but becauſe their Buſineſs is to *ſhew people their Tranſgreſſions*? If they would flatter Sinners that flatter themſelves in a ſinful way, and cry *Peace* to them, to whom the God of Heaven doth not ſpeak Peace, they might avoid a great deal of Reproach and Cenſure; but they dare not do it. They are not to make a new Law and Goſpel, but to preach that which is made: they have

Mat. 21. 45. John 7. 7. Gen. 37. 2. 1 Ki. 22. 8. 21. 20. Rev. 11. 10. Mat. 24. 14. *Naturale eſt & odiſſe quem times, & quem metueris, inveſtare ſi poſſis.* Min. Felix. Iſa. 29. 21. Iſa. 58. 1. Gal. 1. 8, 9.

have their Rule in that Caution given to the Prophet, *Jer.* 15. 19. *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them.* The Hearts and Lives of Men must be brought to *comply* with the Word of God, for the Word of God can never be made to *comply* with the Humours and Fancies of Men. Ministers as they would not for the World make the way to Heaven any straiter or narrower than Christ hath made it, so they dare not make it any broader or easier, nor offer Life and Salvation upon any other Terms than the Gospel hath already settled. If they aim at *pleasing Men*, they cannot approve themselves the *Servants of Christ*, and therefore are they so much spoken against. And the same is the Reason why the most strict and serious *Christians* are so much *spoken against*, because their Piety and Devotion, their Justice and Sobriety, their Zeal and Charity, is a standing Reproof to the wicked World, and condemns it, as the *Faith* and holy *Fear* of *Noah condemned* the Infidelity and Security of the Old World. The *Sodomites* were vexed at *Lot*'s Conversation as much as he was at their filthy Conversation. Wherefore doth the *Blood-Thirsty* hate and revile the *Upright*, while the *Just seek his Soul*, but for the same Reason for which *Cain* hated *Abel*, because *his own Works were Evil and his Brothers Righteous.*

Gal. 1. 10.

Heb. 11. 7.

Prov. 29. 10.

1 John 3. 12.

Now

Now for the APPLICATION of this *DOCTRINE.*

Let us ſee what good Uſe we may make of this Obſervation concerning the Wickedneſs of the Wicked in ſpeaking ſo much againſt Religion and Godlineſs, and what is our Duty in reference hereunto.

Firſt, *Let us admire the Patience and Forbearance of the God of Heaven, in that he bears ſo much, and ſo long, with thoſe that thus ſpeak againſt Him and his Holy Religion.* The *Affront* hereby given Him is very great, and (we would think) *intollerable*, even Hard *Speeches* that reflect upon an Infinite Majeſty, have in them a kind of Infinite Malignity. He *hears* and *knows* all that which is ſaid againſt Him, and againſt his Truth and VVays, and as a Jealous God *reſents* it. He hath always *Power* in his Hands to puniſh the proudeſt of his Enemies, nor would their immediate Ruine be any *Loſs* to him, and yet *Sentence againſt* theſe *Evil Words* and *Works* is *not executed ſpeedily*: Be aſtoniſhed O Heavens, at this, and wonder O Earth! that thoſe wretches which rebel againſt the Beams of ſuch Light and Glory, which ſpurn at the Bowels of ſuch Love and Grace, are not immediately made the viſible Monuments of Divine VVrath and Vengeance, and like, *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, ſet *forth for an Example*! That the Blaſphemers and Scoffers of theſe laſt Days are Eccl. 8. 11.

are not instantly struck *Dumb*, struck *Dead*. That He who hath so much said against him, yet doth himself *keep silence*, and doth not answer all these Reproaches and Contradictions (as he easily could) in Thunder and Lightning. Though his Silence and Forbearance is turn'd to his Reproch even by those that have the Benefit of it, who therefore think him *altogether such an one as themselves*, and take occasion from his *Patience* to question his *Faithfulness*, and challenge his *Justice*, saying, *Where is the Promise of his Coming?* Yet he bears, and his Patience is stretched out even to Long-suffering, because he is *not willing that any should perish*, nor that any means should be left untried to prevent their perishing. Therefore he bears with Sinners, because this is the Day of *his Patience*, and of *their Probation*. The *Wrath of God is reveal'd from Heaven* in the *Word* of God, that we might be aw'd by *Faith*, more than in present *Providences*, which would be an aw to *Sense*. But there is a Day coming, a dreadful Day, when our *God shall come*, and shall no longer *keep silence*, a Day foretold in the early Ages of the World, by *Enoch the seventh from Adam*, when Judgment shall be executed upon ungodly Sinners *for all their hard Speeches*, which Day he will not anticipate, for *he knows it is coming*, Psal. 37. 13. It is agreeable to the regular course of Justice, that all Judgments be adjourn'd till the *Judgment-Day*, and all Executions defer'd till *Execution-Day*: And therefore now he condescends to *reason* with those that speak against him, for their Conviction, as he doth by the Prophet *Ezek.* 18. 25, &c. where he fairly debates the Case with those who said, *The way of the Lord is not equal*, That every Mouth may

Pf. 50. 12.

2 Pet. 3. 3, 4.

2 Pet. 3. 9.

Rom. 1. 18

Pſal. 50. 3.

Jude 14. 15.

may be ſtopped with an unanſwerable *Argument* before it be ſtopt with an irreverſible *Sentence*, and thoſe who have ſpoken againſt him may be ſent *ſpeechleſs* to Hell. He *keeps ſilence* now, becauſe when he doth ſpeak *he will be juſtified*. When our Lord Jeſus was here upon Earth, with what an invincible Patience did he *endure the contradiction of Sinners*; when ſo many ill things were witneſſed againſt him he was ſilent, to admiration, anſwered not a word to all their unjuſt Calumnies and Accuſations, but at the ſame time he *bound them over* to the Judgment of the great Day by that awful word, *Mat. 26. 64. Hereafter ye ſhall ſee the Son of Man ſitting on the right hand of the Power*, ---- and ſtill he *bears* in expectation of that ſame Day. He doth not take Vengeance *preſently* becauſe he hath an *Eternity* before him for the doing of it.

Mat. 22. 12.

Mat. 26. 63.

Joh. 19. 9.

Heb. 10. 13.

And by the way, we may infer from hence, That thoſe who would be like their Heavenly Father, muſt *bear Reproach* and Contradiction patiently. When any thing is ſaid againſt *us*, reflecting never ſo little Diſparagement upon us, or our Families, our Reſentments of it are very ſenſible, and we are apt to take it hainouſly; nay, and to ſay we *do well to be angry*, for it is not a thing to be endur'd; not to be endur'd! O think how much God bears with the Contempt and Reproach caſt upon his *great Name*, and that will ſurely qualify our Reſentments of any indignity done to our *little Names*! Who are we that we muſt not be ſpoken againſt? Or what are our Sayings that they muſt not be contradicted? Such Affronts as theſe we ſhould learn to bear as *David* did when *Shimei* curſed him, *So let him Curſe*; and as the Son of *David* did

2 Sam. 16. 10. 4.

1 Pet. 2. 23.

did when his Enemies reviled him, *Blessing them that Curse us*, and *Praying for them that thus Persecute us, that we may be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven.* God adjourns his Vindication to the great Day, and then surely we may *adjourn* ours to that day as St. *Paul* doth his, 1 *Cor.* 4. 5.

Secondly, *Let us acknowledge the Power of Divine Grace, in keeping up the Christian Religion in the World, notwithstanding the universal Contradiction, and Opposition it hath met with.* One would think that a way thus spoken against every where should have been long ere this lost and ruin'd, and the Christian Name cut off, to be no more
Ps. 83 3,4. in remembrance; which its Adversaries have so industriously endeavoured; if it had been of Men,
Acts 5.38. it had certainly come to naught quickly, though they had let it alone, but being *of God*, it was to admiration Victorious over all oppositon. A Sect, a Cheat could never have supported it self against so much Contradiction; no Human Power or Policy could have kept it up, nor any thing less than an Almighty Arm. The continuance of the Christian Religion in the world to this day is a standing *Miracle* for the Conviction of its Adversaries, and the Confirmation of the Faith of those that adhere to it. When we consider what a mighty Force was raised by the Powers of Darkness against Christianity when it was in its Infancy, how many they were that spoke against it, learned Men, great Men, Books were written, Laws were made against it; those that spoke for it, how few were they? and how mean and despicable! the *foolish things* of the World, and the *Weak*, and yet we see the

See this excellently enlarged upon by the learned *Grotius* de *v. R. C. l.* 2.

Word

Word of God mightily growing and prevailing. Must we not needs say, *this is the Lord's doing, & it is marvellous in our eyes*? The several false Religions of the Heathen with their various Superstitions and Idolatries, though they gave very little Opposition one to another, but agreed together well enough, yet having no foundation in Truth they all wither'd away, and dwindled to nothing, and after the mighty sway they had born, and all means possible us'd to support 'em, at length their Day came to fall, their Oracles silenced, their Altars deserted, and the Gods themselves were *famished*, (*Zeph.* 2. 11.) and *perished from the Earth*, according to that Prediction, *Jer.* 10. 11. which is put into the mouths of the Captiv'd Jews, to retort upon their insulting Enemies, and for that purpose is originally in the *Caldee* Dialect: VVe may ask triumphantly, not only *where are the Gods of* Humath *and of* Arpad? *Where are the Gods of* Sepharvaim Hena, *and* Ivah, those obscure and petty Deities? But where are the Gods of *Babylon* and *Ægypt*, *Greece* and *Rome*, the illustrious names of *Saturn* and *Jupiter*, *Juno* and *Diana*? where are the Gods which our *British* and *Saxon* Ancestors worshipped before they received the Light of the glorious Gospel? Are they not all forgotten as dead Men out of mind, and their names written in the dust? But Christ's Holy Religion, though for some Ages it was utterly destitute of all Secular Supports and Advantages, and was assaulted on all hands by the most vigorous Attacks of its daring and most implacable Enemies, yet it hath strangely *weather'd its point*, and is in *being*, and, thanks be to God, in some places in a *flourishing* state to this day: Its cause

Acts 19. 20.

2 Kin. 18. 34.

cause an *opposed*, but never a *baffled* cause: Let
Exod. 3. 3, 4. us turn aside now, and see this great sight, a Bush *burning* and yet *not consum'd*, and say, The *Lord* is in it of a Truth: *Come and see* the Captain of our Salvation riding forth in the Chariot
Rev. 6. 2. of the everlasting Gospel, with his *Crown* upon his Head, and his *Bow* in his Hand, *conquering and to conquer* --- That which was every where
Acts 28. 3. spoken against Christianity, was like the *Viper* which fasten'd upon St. *Paul*'s Hand, it gave people occasion to think very ill concerning it, and to look for its speedy fall, as the barbarous people concerning him whom they concluded to be a Murtherer, and expected that he should have *swollen*, or *fallen down Dead*. But it hath in all Ages shaken those venomous Beasts into the Fire, and taken no harm, and so hath prov'd its own Divine Original. Let us herein acknow-
Mat. 16. 18. ledge the *Wisdom* and *Power* of our *Lord* Jesus, who hath so firmly built his Church *upon a Rock* that the *Gates of Hell*, i. e. all its Powers, and Policies, and Numbers could never *prevail against it*. *Mahomet*, though he industriously adapted his Religion, to the Sensual Appetites of Men, whose *Reason* only, and not their *Lusts*, could object against it, yet he obtain'd no strength, nor interest at all, till by a thousand Artifices he had got the Power of the Sword, and with it forbad any upon pain of Death to *speak against* him or his Doctrine; charging his first Followers, who were to propagate his Religion, if they met with any that objected against it, not to *dispute* with them, but to *kill* them immediately: By which means that grand Imposture in a little time got some footing in the world; and by the same Barbarous and Inhumane Methods, it hath been

See the learned Dr. *Humfrey Prideaux*'s excellent History of the Life of *Mahomet* lately published.

been supported now above a Thousand Years. And in like manner that great Enemy of the Church, represented in St. *John*'s Vision, maintains his Interest by causing that *as many as would not worship the Image of the Beast should be killed*, Rev. 13. 15. Thus are Errors and false Religions propagated; strip them of their Supports, & they fall to the ground of course; but on the contrary, the Christian Religion was planted and preserv'd not only *without*, but *against* secular Force, recommended and upheld by its own intrinsick Truth and Excellency, and that Divine Power which accompanied it. The Preachers and Professers of it *every where spoken against*, and yet every where getting ground, and strangely victorious, purely by the *word of their Testimony*, and by *not loving their Lives unto the Death.* Thus is come *Salvation* and *Strength*, and the *Kingdom of our God, and the Power of his Christ.* Rev. 12. 10, 11.

Thirdly, *Let us greatly lament the Folly and Wickedness of those who speak against Christ and his Holy Religion, and if we can do any thing, have compassion upon them, and help to undeceive them, and rectify their Mistakes.* Surely this is one of *the Abominations committed* among us, for which we should be found among those that *sigh and cry.* Ezek. 9. 4. one of those Instances of the *Pride* of Sinners for which our Souls should *weep in secret*, Jer. 13. 17. This is that *Reproach of the solemn Assembly* which is such a *Burthen* to all good Men. *Zeph.* 3. 18. Our Ears should tingle, and our Hearts tremble to hear the Reproach and Contempt cast upon Christ and his Religion, or to hear *of* it, and looking upon our selves as nearly concern'd in *Sacred Things*, we should be sensibly touch'd with the *Profanation* of them.

To affect us herewith, let us consider,

1. The great *Dishonour* hereby done to our God in the World. They that reflect upon his Truths and Ways, his Word and Ordinances, reflect upon him, He that *toucheth* these *toucheth the apple of his eye*; If therefore we have any love to God, or concern for his Honour, and have cordially espous'd the Interests of his Kingdom, what is an *Affront* to him, will surely be a *Grief* to us. It cannot but be a very melancholly Thought to every sensible Soul, That the God that *made* the World is *made* so *light* of in the World, That he who doth so much *Good* to the Children of Men, hath so little *Honour from* them, nay, and hath so much Dishonour done him by
Isa. 52. 5. them every day, and *his Name continually blasphemed*. That the Lord Jesus, who *so loved the World*, is so much hated and despised by the World. The *Reproaches* of them who thus reproach our Master, if we be his faithful Servants
Psa. 69 10. we should feel as *falling upon us*. And if he take
Mat. 25. 45. what is said and done against his People, as said and done against himself, much more reason have they to find themselves aggrieved in that which is said and done against him. If we pray heartily that God's *Name* may be *hallowed*, as we should do every day, we should grieve heartily that his *Name* is *dishonoured*, as we see it is every day. And our resentments of the Reproach cast upon God and Religion, we should make a humble and pious *Remonstrance* of before God in Prayer, as *King* Hezekiah *spread* Rabshakeh's blasphemous Letter *before the Lord*, with that tender and affectionate Request, *Lord bow down thine ear and hear: Open, Lord, thine eyes and see*, 2 Kin. 19. 16. How pathetically doth *Joshua* plead,

plead, *chap.* 7. 9. *What wilt thou do unto thy great Name?* And with what a concern doth the Pſalmiſt in the name of the Church inſiſt upon this, *Pſal.* 74. 10. *O God, how long ſhall the Adverſary reproach? Shall the Enemy blaſpheme thy Name for ever?* And *v.* 18. *Remember this that the Enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the fooliſh People have blaſphemed thy Name.* And how earneſtly doth he beg, *v.* 22. *Ariſe, O God, plead thine own Cauſe.* Thus ſhould the Honour of God and Religion lie nearer our Hearts than any other concern whatſoever.

2. Conſider the *miſerable Condition* of *thoſe* that preſumptuouſly *ſpeak* againſt God and Religion. Tho' they may do it with an Air of Aſſurance, as if they run no hazard, yet he that *rolleth* this *Stone*, *it will* certainly *return upon him* ſooner or later. They that ſpeak againſt Religion *ſpeak againſt their own Heads*, and their own Tongues will at laſt fall upon them. We have reaſon to bewail their Madneſs, and to pity, and pray for them, for they know not what they do. Miſerable Souls! How will they be *deceived* at laſt, when they ſhall find that *God is not mocked*! And that while they were ſtudying to put contempt on Religion, they were but preparing eternal Shame and Confuſion for themſelves! The Lord is a jealous God, and will not hold them guiltleſs that thus profane his Name: Their *Wit*, and *Learning*, and *Figure* in the World, may embolden them in their Sin, and bear them up a while in an open Defiance of all that's Sacred, but nothing can prevent their utter Ruine beſides a ſerious and ſincere *Repentance*, which is an *unſaying*, with Shame and Self-lothing, of all that which they have proudly ſpoken againſt God

Pſa. 64. 8.

Gal. 6. 7.

and Godliness. They that pervert the right ways of the Lord will certainly *fall therein*, and they that wrest the Scriptures do it *to their own Destruction*. Religion's Motto is, *Nemo me impune lacessit*. 'Tis ill jesting with edg-tools. *Jerusalem* will certainly be a *burthensome Stone to all People*, that *burthen themselves with it*. They that spurn at the Rock of Salvation, will not only be unable to remove it, but will find it a *Stone of Stumbling*, and a *Rock of Offence*. And we find those who ridicul'd the Word of the Lord, *broken, and snared, and taken*. Let all those therefore that mourn in *Sion*, weep over those that will not weep for themselves; and look with pity and compassion upon those that look upon them with scorn and contempt.

Hos. 14. 9. 2 Pet. 3. 16. Zach. 12. 3. 1 Pet. 2. 8. Isa. 28. 13.

3. Consider the *Mischief* that is hereby *done* to the *Souls of others*. They who thus err, their error remaineth not with themselves, but this poisonous and malignant Breath infects others. Words spoken against Religion *eat as doth a Canker*, and they who speak them, seldom *perish alone* in their iniquity, for *many follow their pernicious ways*. Unwary Souls are easily beguil'd, and brought to conceive rooted Prejudices against that which they hear every where spoken against, and few have *Consideration* and *Resolution* enough to maintain a good opinion of that which they that set up for *Wits*, make it their business to *cry down*. *Sergius Paulus* was a *prudent Man*, and yet St. *Paul* saw him in danger of being turned *away from the Faith*, by the subtle Suggestions of *Elymas* the Sorcerer, which therefore the Apostle resented with a more than ordinary keenness. It is sad to think how many *Young People*, who perhaps were well Educated and Hope-

2 Tim. 2. 17. 2 Pet. 2. 2. Act. 13. 7. 8, 9, 10.

ful,

ful, when they go abroad into the World, by converſing with thoſe who lie in wait to deceive, have their minds inſenſibly vitiated and debauch'd, and perhaps they are made *ſeven times more the Children of Hell than thoſe that firſt ſeduced them.* Under a pretence of *free* Thought, and *faſhionable* Converſation, and a *generous* Diſdain of Preciſeneſs and Singularity; Atheiſtical Principles are imbib'd, the Reſtraints of Conſcience ſhaken off, Bruriſh Luſts not only indulg'd but pleaded for, and ſerious Godlineſs and Devotion look'd upon with Contempt, and thus the Heart is impregnably fortify'd for Satan againſt Chriſt and his Goſpel, Wrath is treaſur'd up againſt the Day of Wrath, and thoſe who might have been the *Bleſſing* prove the *Plague* of their Age, which is a Lamentation, and ſhall be for a Lamentation to all that wiſh well for the ſouls of Men, and to thoſe eſpecially that are deſirous of the welfare of the *riſing Generation.*

Fourthly, *Let us take heed that none of us do at at any time, directly or indirectly, ſpeak againſt the ways of Religion and Godlineſs, or ſay a Confederacy, with thoſe that do ſo.* Submit to Divine *Inſtructions* given *with a ſtrong hand* not to *walk in the way of* thoſe *People* that ſpeak ill of Religion. Take heed of embracing any Notions which ſecretly tend to derogate from the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, or to diminiſh the Honour of Religion in the Soul, or of accuſtoming your ſelves to ſuch Expreſſions as treat not Sacred Things with that awful Regard which is due to them. Thoſe were never reckon'd Wiſe Men that would rather loſe a *Friend* than *a Jeſt*, much leſs are they to be accounted ſo that will rather Iſa. 8. 11, 12.

loſe the Favour of their God. Thoſe that in their common Converſe make themſelves merry with *ſerious* things, how can it be expected they ſhould at any time be *ſerious* in them, or experience the influence and comfort of them? It is not likely that thoſe who make the Word of God the ſubject of their *Jeſts*, ſhould ever *make* it the Guide of their way, or *find* it the ſpring of their Joys. Let us not chuſe to *aſſociate* with thoſe that have light thoughts of Religion, and are ready upon all occaſions to ſpeak againſt it. It is not without good reaſon that among the *many words* with which St. *Peter* exhorted his *New Converts*, this only is recorded, *Save your ſelves from this untoward Generation*, Acts 2. 40.

Pſal. 1. 1. Thoſe that liſten to the *Counſel of the Ungodly*, and *Stand in the way of Sinners*, as willing to walk with them, will come at length (if Almighty Grace prevent not) to *ſet in the ſeat of the Scornful*. Let us therefore abide by that which *Job* and *Eliphaz*, even in the heat of Diſpute, were agreed in, that *the Counſel of the Wicked ſhall be far from us*, which Proteſtation we have, *Job* 21. 16. and 22. 18. It's dangerous making Friendſhip with thoſe that have an enmity to ſerious Godlineſs, leſt we *learn their way*, and *get a Snare* to our Souls.

There are two common *Pretences*, and ſeemingly plauſible ones, under which thoſe that *ſpeak againſt* Religion ſhelter themſelves, but they are neither of them juſtifiable.

1. They pretend, that it is only for *Argument ſake*, that they object againſt Religion, and pick quarrels with it, and (ſo little eſteem they have of the thing call'd *Sincerity*) they will not be thought to mean as they ſay. And are the great Prin-

Principles of Religion become ſuch *Moot-points*, ſuch Matters of *doubtful Diſputation*, that it is indifferent which ſide of the Queſtion a Man takes, and upon which he may argue, *pro* or *con*, at his pleaſure? That grave and weighty ſaying of a Learned Heathen is enough to ſilence this pretence, *Mala enim & impia conſuetudo eſt, contra Deos diſputandi, ſive ex animo id ſit, ſive ſimulate.* It's an ill thing to talk againſt Religion, whether a Man means as he ſaith or no, or (in the Language of our Age) whether he ſpeak ſeriouſly, or only *banter*. *Julian*, the Apoſtate, when, before he threw off his Diſguiſe, he frequently argued againſt Chriſtianity, pretended it was only for *Diſputation* ſake. But out of the abundance of the Heart the Mouth ſpeaks, and whence can ſuch evil things come but from an evil Treaſure there?

Cic. de Nat. Deor. lib. 2. *ad Fin.*

2. They pretend that it is not *Religion* that they ridicule and expoſe to Contempt, but ſome particular *Forms* and *Modes* of religious Worſhip which they do not like. And this is one ill effect of the unhappy Diviſions among Chriſtians, that while one ſide hath labour'd to make the other contemptible; Religion in general hath ſuffer'd on *all ſides*. To *reprove* what we think amiſs, with Prudence and Meekneſs is well, but to *reproach* and make a *Jeſt* of that which our Fellow-Chriſtians look upon as *Sacred*, and make a part of their Religion, cannot be to any good purpoſe at all. To ſcoff at the Miſtakes and Weakneſſes of our Brethren, is the way to provoke and harden them, but not to convince and reform them. They who think to juſtify this way of *ridiculing* thoſe that differ from them, by the Inſtance of *Elijah*'s jeering the Prieſts of

Baal, perhaps *Know not what manner of Spirit they are of*, no more than those Disciples did who Luk. 9. 55. would have their intemperate Hearts countenanced by the Example of that great Prophet.

Fifthly, *Let us that profess the Christian Religion, be very cautious that we do not give occasion to any to speak against it.* If there are those in all places that are industrious to cast reproach upon Religion, then we have need to *walk circumspectly*, and to look well to our goings, that those who *watch for* our *halting* may have no occasion given them to Blaspheme. It is certain that tho' in Religion there is nothing which may be justly spoken against, yet among *those* that profess it there is too often found that which deserves to be tax'd, and which cannot pass without just and severe Reflections. — *Pudet haec opprobria nobis* — Are there not those within the Pale of the Church, *through whom*, the *Name of God* and his *Doctrine* are *blasphemed*, and *by reason of whom the way of Truth is evil spoken of*. Are there not those who wear Christ's Livery, but are a Scandal to his Family, *Spots in the Love-Feasts*, and a standing Reproach to that worthy Name, by which they are call'd? Now though it is certainly very unjust and unfair to impute the faults of Professors to the Religion they profess, and to reproach Christianity, because there are those that are call'd Christians who expose themselves to Reproach; yet it is, without question, the Sin of those who *give* Men *occasion* to do so. This was *the Condemnation* in *David*'s Case, and entail'd the Sword upon his House, though the Sin was pardon'd, that by it he had *given great occasion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*,

Ro. 2. 24. 2 Pet. 2. 2. Jude 12.

The foulest Reproaches of the Primitive Christians took rise from the vile practises of the *Gnosticks*, and *other Pseudochristians*. Of which Vid. *Euseb.* Eccl. Hist. l. 4. c. 7.

2 Sam.

2 Sam. 12. 14. Let us therefore double our diligence and care, to give no offence either to Jew or Gentile, that Religion which hath so often been *wounded in the House of her Friends*, may never be wounded through our sides.

If we enquire (as we are commanded to do) what it is that gives occasion of Reflection upon Religion, we shall find that the *Imprudences* of those that profess it, give some occasion, but their *Immoralities* much more.

1. The *Imprudences* of Christians often turn to the Reproach of Christianity. There may be such over-doing even in Well-doing, as may prove Undoing. When more stress is laid than ought to be upon some instances of Religion, to the justling out of others, and the Exercises of Devotion are either mis-timed, or mis-placed, or mis-proportion'd, Religion is hereby mis-represented, or look'd upon to disadvantage. Rash and indiscreet *Zeal* may give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak against all religious *Zeal*. Therefore *walk in Wisdom towards them that are without.* Religion is a most sweet and pleasant and amiable thing: Let not us by our Indiscretion make it a *Task* to our selves, and a *Terror* to others. The more the Children of God are *Children of Wisdom*, the more they *justify* it, and its ways. Christian *Prudence* is very much the *beauty* and *strength* of Christian *Piety*. Though it will secure the welfare of our own Souls if we walk in our Integrity, yet it is necessary for the preserving of the Credit of our Profession, that we walk *in Wisdom*, that *Wisdom of the Prudent* which is to *understand his way*, that *Wisdom* which is *profitable to direct*. And *if any Man lack* this *Wisdom*, *let him* ask

Col. 4. 5.

Luk. 7. 35.

Prov. 14. 8.

Ec. 10. 10.

Jam. 1. 5. *ask it of God*, who *gives liberally*, and *upbraids us not* with our Folly. Pray with *David*, Psal. 27. 11. *Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain Path because of mine Enemies.* (Hebr. because of *mine Observers.*) Our Enemies are our Observers, and will be ready to reproach our *Way*, for the sake of the *false steps* we take in it, and therefore we have need to *ponder the Path of our Feet*, and let Discretion guide and govern our Zeal.

2. The *Immoralites* of those who profess Christianity turn much more to the reproach of that Holy Religion; when those that are called Christians, are griping and covetous, and greedy of the World, when they are false and deceitful, and unjust in their Dealings, sowre and morose, and unnatural to their Relations, turbulent and unquiet in Societies, when they are froward and passionate, proud and haughty, hard-hearted and oppressive, loose and intemperate. When they are found guilty of Lying and Cheating, Drunkenness or Uncleanness. When it appears that they keep up some secret *Haunts* of Sin, under the cloke and covert of a specious Profession, when they that profess the Christian Faith lick up the vomit of Heathen, and allow themselves in those things that are contrary to the Light and Law even of Natural Religion. This is that which opens the mouths of the Adversaries to speak reproachfully of that Religion, the Profession of which is made to consist with such vile Practises, which cannot possibly consist with the *Power* of it. This makes People ready to say as that *Mahometan* Prince did, when the *Christians* had broke their League with him, *O Jesus, are these thy Christians?* Or as the complaint was upon

on another occaſion, *Aut hoc non Evangelium, aut hi non Evangelici*, Either this is not Goſpel, or theſe are not to be call'd Profeſſors of the Goſpel. If Miniſters *give offence in any thing*, not they only, but their *Miniſtry* will *be blamed*. Nay, if *Servants*, Chriſtians of the loweſt rank and figure, if they be unfaithful, and diſobedient to the Government they are under, the *Name of God, and his Doctrine*, is likely to be *blaſphemed*. Let us therefore who profeſs Relation to the Eternal God, and Dependance upon the Bleſſed Jeſus, and a Regard to the Holy Scriptures, as we tender the Reputation of our Religion, *walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleaſing*. Let us Order our Converſation ſo in every thing, as that we may *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour*. While we are call'd by ſo *good* a Name, let us not dare to do an *ill* thing. The Diſciples of Chriſt are as a *City upon a Hill*, and have many eyes upon them, and therefore have need to behave themſelves with a great deal of Caution, and to *abſtain from all appearance of evil*. Let us not do any thing that is unjuſt, or unbecoming us, nor allow our ſelves in that which we know the Goſpel we profeſs doth by no means allow of, leſt *we* be to anſwer another day, for all the *Reproach* of Religion which we have *occaſion'd*: How light ſoever we may make of this now, we ſhall find that it will greatly enflame the Reckoning ſhortly, when God will affect the Honour of his own Name, and will be *glorified upon* thoſe by whom he was not *glorified*. In conſideration of this, let us ſee to it that we *have our Converſation honeſt* among the Adverſaries of our Religion, that they who *ſpeak againſt us* as Evil-doers, *may*,

2 Cor. 6. 3
1 Tim. 6. 1.
Col. 1. 10.
Tit. 2. 10.
Mat. 5. 14.
2 Theſ. 5. 12.

1 Pet. 2. 12. *may, by our Good Works which they shall behold,* be brought to *glorify God,* and to entertain good thoughts of Religion, or at least, that v. 15. *we may with well-doing put to silence the ignorance of foolish Men.* Our Religion, I am sure, is an *Honour* to us; let not us then be a *Dishonour* to it.

Sixthly, *If there be those every where that speak against Religion and Godliness, let us then as we have opportunity be ready to speak for it.* Every Christian should be both a *Witness* and an *Advocate* for his Religion, and the rather because it is so much oppos'd and contradicted. Next to our *Care* not to be a *Shame* to the Gospel, should be our *Resolution* not to be *ashamed* of the Gospel. You are *Subpœna'd* by the King of Kings *to appear* for him in the World: *Ye are my Witnesses saith the Lord,* Isa. 43. 10. Do not betray this Cause then by *declining* your Testimony, how much soever you may be brow-beaten and confronted. Say with a holy boldness as *Elihu,* Job 36. 2. *Suffer me a little and I will shew you, that I have yet to speak on God's behalf.* You hear what is daringly said against God, how his holy Name is trampled upon and abus'd, his Truths contradicted, his Word and Ordinances vilified, and have you never a word to say for him? Is our Lord Jesus appearing for us in Heaven, pleading our Cause there, pleading it with his own *blood,* and shall not we be ready to appear for him on Earth, and plead his Cause though it were with the hazzard of our *blood?* As it is then a *time to keep silence,* when we our selves are spoken against, *I as a Deaf Man heard not,* so it is then a *time to speak,* when God is spoken against,

gainſt, and the Honour of our Religion lies at Pſal. 38.
ſtake, and at ſuch a time we muſt take heed, leſt 13.
by a cowardly ſilence we betray ſo juſt a Cauſe, Eccl. 3. 7.
as if we were either *aſham'd* or *afraid* to own it. Wiſdom's Children ſhould take all occaſions to juſtify Wiſdom, and vindicate it from the aſperſions that are caſt upon it. Read the doom of him that is *aſham'd of Chriſt and of his Words in this adulterous generation*. Mark 8. 38. *Of him ſhall the Son of Man be aſham'd, when he comes in the Glory of his Father.* Not confeſſing Chriſt when we are call'd to it, is in effect *denying* him, and diſowning Relation to him, and they who do ſo, except they repent as *Peter* did, will ſhortly be denied and diſowned by him. If we ſhould, with an *angry countenance* at leaſt, *drive away a backbiting Tongue* that reproacheth our Brother, much more a Blaſphemous Tongue that reproacheth our Maker. Should we hear a near Relation or a dear Friend (in whoſe Reputation it is natural to us to reckon our ſelves ſharers) ſpoken againſt and ſlander'd, we would readily appear in his Vindication; and have we no reſentments of the Contempt and Contumely caſt upon Religion? Can we ſit by *contentedly* to hear God and Chriſt, and the Scripture and ſerious Godlineſs reflected upon, and have we nothing to ſay in their behalf? Common *equity* obligeth us to be the Patrons of a *juſt*, but *wronged* Cauſe. And that we may not think our ſelves diſcharged from this Duty by our inability to defend the Truths and Ways of God, and ſo make our *Ignorance* and unskilfulneſs in the word of Righteouſneſs, an excuſe for our *Cowardiſe* and want of Zeal, we ought to take pains to furniſh our ſelves with a clear and diſtinct knowledge of Luk. 12. 9. 2 Tim. 2. 12. Prov. 25. 23.

the

Luke 1. 4. the *certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed.* We must labour to understand not only the Truths and Principles, but the Grounds and Evidences of our Religion, that we may be able to *give an Answer* (ἀπολογίαν, an *Apology*) *to*
1 Pet. 3. 15. *every Man that asks us a Reason of the Hope that is in us.* How industrious are the prophane Wits of the Age to find out something to say against Religion, and should not that *quicken* us to pro-
2 Cor. 6. 7. vide our selves with the *Armor of Righteousness, both on the right hand and on the left*, aiming at the
Col. 2. 2. *Riches of the full assurance of Understanding*? And if we do (as there is occasion) with Humility and Sincerity, and from a principle of Zeal for God, and his Honour, appear in Defence of Religion, and its injur'd Cause, we may doubtless take encouragement from that promise, Mat. 10. 19. *It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* God will *own* those that *own* him, and will not fail to furnish his faithful *Advocates* with needful *Instructions*, and many a time or-
Psal. 8. 2. dains such *strength out of the mouth of Babes and Sucklings* as strangely *stills the Enemy and the Avenger.*

Lastly, *Let none of us ever think the worse of the way of Religion and Godliness for its being every where spoken against, nor be frighten'd hereby from walking in that way.* The Contempt cast upon the Practise of Piety is with many an invincible Objection against it; their good Impressions, good purposes and good overtures are hereby crush'd and brought to nothing: They have that *within 'em* which tells 'em that the way of Sobriety and serious Godliness is a very good way, and they

they sometimes hear that *Word behind them, saying, This is the walk ye in it,* But they have those about 'em that tell them otherwise, and thus the convictions of Conscience are over-rul'd and baffled by the Censures and Reproaches of Men, whose Praise they covet *more than the Praise of God.* Isa. 30. 21.

But to take off the force of this Objection, let us consider these four Things.

1. Consider *who they are* that speak against Religion and Godliness, not only that they are *Mortal* Men, whom the *Moth shall eat up like a Garment, Men that shall die,* and the *Sons of Men which shall be made as Grass,* all whose thoughts will shortly perish with them, and therefore why should we *fear their Reproach, or be afraid of their revilings?* Nor only they that are *fallible* Men who may be mistaken, and whose Judgment is by no means *decisive,* nor such as will bear us out: Shall we put what Men say in the Scale against what God saith? *Let God be true and every Man a Liar.* We must not be *judg'd* hereafter, and therefore should not be *rul'd* now by the Sentiments and Opinions of Men: But those that speak against Religion are also for the most part *ill* Men; Men of unsettled Heads, debauch'd Consciences, and profligate Lives. 'Tis *the Fool* and none but he, that *saith in his heart, there is no God.* The *Scoffers* of the last daies are Men that *walk after their own Lusts,* whose carnal, fleshly Interest retains them on that side. *David* was abus'd by the *abjects,* Psal. 35. 15. and the Christians at *Thessalonica* by *certain lewd Fellows of the baser sort,* Acts 17. 5. Such as those are the Isa. 51. 7. 8, 12.

Men

Men that make a mock at Religion, and shall we be sway'd and influenced in the greatest Concerns of our Immortal Souls by such Men as these? Shall those have the Government of *us* that have so little Government of *themselves?* Shall the Cavils and vain Scoffs of those, who know not what it is to be *serious*, carry the day against the deliberate Sentiments of all Wise and Good Men, who have with one consent subscrib'd to the Equity and Goodness of Religion's Ways? If we chuse such as these for our Leaders, surely the *Blind lead the Blind*, and we know the consequence.

2. Consider how *trifling* and *frivolous* that is which is commonly said against Religion and Godliness. The Devil made his first fatal assault upon Mankind by *Lies* and *Slanders*, suggesting hard thoughts of God, and promising Impunity in Sin; and by the same *wretched* methods he still supports and carries on his Interest in the World. They that speak against Religion, *make Lies their Refuge*, and under *falshood they hide themselves*. All those bold and daring things which are spoken against Religion, are either groundless and unproved Calumnies, or very unjust and unfair Representations. Hence the Enemies
2 Thes. 3. 2. of Religion are said to be *absurd* and *unreasonable Men*. Men that while they cry up the Oracles of Reason, rebel against all the *Light* and *Laws* of it. Put all that together which is spoken against Godliness, and weigh it in the Balances of right Reason, and you will write *Tekel* upon it, *weigh'd in the Ballances and found*

found wanting. And, as if an over-ruling Providence had forced the Scoffers of theſe laſt days to confeſs their own Infatuation. Some of thoſe that have been moſt ſharp in their Invectives againſt Religion, have been no leſs free in their *Satyrs againſt Reaſon* it ſelf, as if they were reſolv'd to anſwer the Character of *Solomon*'s Fool, whoſe *Wiſdom fails him* ſo far, that *he ſaith to every one that he is a Fool.* Eccl. 10. 3.

3. Conſider how *much* is to be ſaid *for Religion* notwithſtanding it is *every where ſpoken againſt.* Religion hath Reaſon on its ſide, its Cauſe is a Good Cauſe; and it is the right way whoever *ſpeaks* againſt it. *It is no diſparagement* (as that excellent Pen expreſſeth it) *to be laughed at, but to deſerve to be ſo*; you have heard Religion reproach'd, but did you ever find that it *deſerv'd* to be ſo? Nay; on the contrary, have you not found that it very well deſerves your beſt Affections and Services? Enquire of thoſe that have made trial of it, conſult the Experiences of others: *Call now, if there be any that will anſwer thee, and to which of the Saints wilt thou turn? Ask thy Father and he will ſhew thee, thine Elders and they will tell thee, that the Fear of the Lord that is Wiſdom, and to depart from Evil, that is Underſtanding.* They will tell thee, That Religion's Ways are *Ways of Pleaſantneſs*, and all her *Paths are Peace*, and that all the Wealth and Pleaſure in this World is not worth one Hours Communion with God in Jeſus Chriſt. They will tell thee, That there is no Truths ſo certain and weighty as Divine *Truths*, and that no Statutes and Judgments are ſo righteous as the Divine *Law*, which is *Holy*, *Juſt*, and *Good*. They will tell thee, That real Holineſs and Sanctification

Arch Bp. *Tillotſon's* Serm. on 2 Pet. 2. 3.

Job. 5. 1. Deut. 32. 7. Job. 28. 28 Prov. 3. 17

is the Perfection of the *Human* Nature, as well as the Participation of a *Divine* Nature, That a firm Belief of the *Principles* of Religion is the greatest improvement of our intellectual Powers, a strict Adherence to its *Rules* our surest Guide in all our Ways, and a chearful Dependance upon its *Promises*, the Fountain of better *Joys*, and the Foundation of better *Hopes* than any we can be furnish'd with in the things of *Sense* and *Time*. They will tell thee that a Life of *serious Godliness* is incomparably the most Sublime and Honourable, the most Sweet and Comfortable Life a Man can live in this World; and that nothing doth more answer the end of our Creation, better befriend Societies, nor conduce more to our true interest in both Worlds than that Holy Religion which is *every where spoken against*.

4. Consider that the cause of Religion and Godliness, however it be spoken against and oppos'd, will infallibly be the prevailing Cause at last. We are sensible of a mighty struggle in the World betwixt the *seed of the Woman and the seed of the Serpent*; *Michael* and his *Angels* on the one side, and the *Dragon* and his *Angels* on the other. Many there are that *speak against* Religion, and are very vigorous in opposing it, and some, tho' but a few, that are speaking *for* it, contending for the Faith, and striving against Sin, now it is desirable to know which of these contesting Interests will be *victorious*; and we may be assur'd that the cause of God and Religion will certainly *carry the day*. Contradicted Truths will be effectually clear'd and vindicated; Despised Holiness will be honour'd; Mistakes rectify'd; Reproaches roll'd away; and every thing set in a true Light. *Then you shall return and discern* between

Mal. 3. 18.

tween Truth and Falſhood, Right and Wrong, which now it is not always eaſie to do. The *Day of the Lord* is ſaid to be in the *Valley of Deciſion*, Joel 3. 14. Becauſe *then* and *there* will this great Cauſe be *decided*, which has been ſo long depending, and a definitive Sentence given *from* which there will ly no *Appeal*, and *againſt* which there will be no *Exception*. *Our God will* then *come and will not Keep* Silence; whoever now Speak *againſt* Religion he will then ſpeak *for* it, and will undoubtedly be *juſtified when he ſpeaks*, and *clear when he judgeth*. Particular Parties and Intereſts, as ſuch, will wither and come to nothing, But *Catholick Chriſtianity*, that is *Denying Ungodlineſs and Worldly Luſts*, and living *Soberly, Righteouſly, and Godly in this preſent World*, in expectation of the *Bleſſed Hope*: This is *Good*, and the Goodneſs of it being founded on the unchangeable Will of the *Eternal* Mind, it is Eternally *Good*, and no doubt will be Eternally *Glorious*, whatever is ſaid againſt it. This, this is that *Gold* and *Silver*, and thoſe *Precious Stones*, which will ſtand the Teſt of the *Fire* that ſhall *try every Mans Work*, 1 Cor. 3. 12, 13. and will be *found unto Praiſe, and Honour, and Glory at the Appearing of Jeſus Chriſt*. Pſal. 50. 3. Pſal. 51. 4. 1 Pet. 1. 7.

Aſſure your ſelves (Chriſtians) there is a *Day of Recompences for the Controverſy of Sion* coming, and it is at Hand; *Behold the Judge ſtandeth before the Door*. Then *Vice* and *Wickedneſs* which now appear ſo daring, ſo threatning, will be effectually and irrecoverably *cruſh'd*, and ſuch a fatal and incurable *Blow* given to the *Serpents Head* that he ſhall never hiſs, ſhall never ſpit his Venom any more: Then ſhall *the Upright have the Dominion*, *Pſal.* 49. 14. and all the faithful Iſa. 34. 8. Jam. 5. 9.

Souldiers of the Lord Jesus shall be call'd to *set*
Jos.10,24. their *Feet upon the Necks* of Principalities and
Powers. Then Atheists and Blaspheмers, the
Debauchees and prophane Scoffers of the Age,
will have their Mouths stopt with an irresistable
Conviction; will have all their vile Calumnies
visibly confuted; their Hearts fill'd with un-
speakable Horror, and their Faces with everlasting
Isa.28.17. Shame: Their *Refuge of Lies* will then be *swept*
away, and *Rocks and Mountains* call'd upon in vain
Rev.6.16. to shelter them: Then shall *the Righteous* who
are now trampled upon and despised, *shine as the*
Mat.13.43. *Sun in the Firmament of their Father. Wisdom* and
her *Children* shall be first *justified*, and then glori-
fied before all the World: And they that through
Rev.15.2. Grace have *gotten the Victory over the Beast, and*
over his Image, shall solace themselves, and
praise their Redeemer with everlasting Songs of
Triumph. The Dirt that is now unjustly thrown
upon them, will not only be wiped off, but will
Mat.5.11, 12. add to their Glory, and every Reproach for the
Testimony of Jesus will be a Pearl in their
Crown. The Righteous Judge of Heaven and
Earth *will* shortly *render to every Man according*
Rom.2. 6, 7, 8, 9. *to his Work: To them who by patient continuance in*
Well-doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immor-
tality in the other World, and (in pursuit of
that) patiently bear Disgrace and Contempt in
this, to them he will render *Eternal Life*, which
will make them *as* Happy as they can *desire*, far
more Happy than they can now *conceive*. But to
them that are Contentious, and do not obey the Truth,
but contradict it, and rebel against the Light and
Laws of it, being resolv'd to *obey Unrighteousness*,
to them he will render, with a just and Almighty
Hand, *Indignation and Wrath*, the effect of which

will

will be ſuch *Tribulation and Anguiſh* to the *Soul*, as will make them *feel* eternally, what now they will not be perſwaded to believe, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God*; for never any *hardned* their *Hearts againſt him* and proſper'd. Brethren, *Theſe are the true Sayings of God*, on the certainty of which, we may venture our Immortal Souls. Heb. 10. 31. Rev. 19. 9.

They who ſpeak and act ſo much againſt Religion, deſign to run it down, and extirpate it, that the *Name of it may be no more in remembrance*, and perhaps you hear them ſometimes boaſt of their ſucceſs herein: If they can but handſomly (as they think) ridicule the ſacred Text, or Banter any of the Divine Myſteries, or Hector over a good Man, they are ready to triumph, as if they had *run down* Religion: Run down Religion? In the Name of my great Maſter, I *defy* all the Powers of Hell and Earth to run it down: They may ſooner run down the flowing Tide, or the Sun when he goes forth in his ſtrength, than run down the leaſt of the Dictates of Eternal Truth, not *one iota or tittle* of which ſhall fall to the Ground. *Dagon* will certainly fall before the *Ark* of the Lord; and the Rod of *Aaron* will *Swallow up* the *Rods* of the *Magicians*. Do they talk of *running down* Religion, and the Scriptures, and the Ordinances of Chriſt? *The Virgin the Daughter of* Sion *hath deſpiſed them, and laughed them to ſcorn, the Daughter of* Jeruſalem *hath ſhaken her Head at them*; and hath therefore *put them to ſhame becauſe God hath deſpiſed them*, as it is ſaid, *Pſal.* 53. 5. He that *ſets in the Heavens* enjoying himſelf, *and rides upon the Heavens*, for the Help of his People, derides their Attempts againſt the Kingdom of his Son, as vain and fruitleſs. *The* Pſa. 83. 4. *Magna eſt Veritas & prævalebit.* Mat. 5. 18. Ex. 7. 12. Iſa. 37. 22. Pſal. 2. 4. Deut. 33. 26.

Lord

Psa. 37. 13. *Lord laugheth at them, for he sees that his Day is coming.* They have *their* Day *now*, it is *their* Hour and the Power of Darkness: But God will have *his Day* shortly, and a Glorious Day it will be, when our Lord Jesus shall appear in all the *Power* and *Grandeur* of the *Upper* World, to the everlasting Terror and Confusion of all his *Adversaries*, and the everlasting Joy and Honour of all his faithful *Servants* and *Soldiers*; With the believing *Hopes* and *Prospects* of which *Day*, let all those who heartily *espouse* and *plead* Religion's righteous Cause, *Comfort* themselves and one another.

FINIS.